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# A Benchmark Portfolio Evaluating SPED 201: Introduction to Special Education

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A Benchmark Portfolio Evaluating SPED 201: Introduction to Special Education

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Spring 2018

## Table of Contents

<b>Objectives.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Course Overview .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Why Evaluate This Course? .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Teaching Methods and Course Activities .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Supplemental In-Class Activities.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Guest Lectures.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Traditional Lecturing .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Discussion Board Assignments .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>General Discussion.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Analysis of Student Learning.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Quizzes and Exams .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Discussion Board Posts .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Statistical Analysis of Student Characteristics.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Surveys and Student Evaluations .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Reflections.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Appendix: Course Syllabus.....</b>	<b>31</b>

## **Objectives**

### **Course Overview**

This course introduces key topics and ideas that are relevant to teaching and/or working with children (and adults) with disabilities. The course provides foundational knowledge of concepts that apply to diverse groups of individuals, including federal law concerning teaching students with disabilities, the process of creating an individualized education plan (IEP) for students with disabilities, and practices for teaching students with disabilities such as response-to-intervention (RTI) techniques and inclusive classroom practices. Additionally, this course provides a basic overview of many of the thirteen disability categories defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including introduction of key terminology, the history of a particular field, and identification procedures and specific instructional practices used to support students with specific disabilities.

Students who take this course include dual majors in elementary education and special education, secondary special education majors, and non-special education majors such as nursing and speech/language pathology majors. Because this is an introductory level course, students enrolled in the course are usually in their first or second year of college, but there are several students in their third or fourth year, particularly among the non-majors. Most of the students who are special education majors will go on to either become teachers of students with disabilities or another service professional (e.g., speech/language pathologist) who works with individuals with disabilities. Some will become general classroom teachers that will work with students with disabilities in their classrooms and with other professionals who are trained to specifically work with students with disabilities and their families. The majority of students will work with individuals with disabilities throughout their careers. Therefore, this course provides

the foundational knowledge that students will need throughout their continuing programs in higher education, as well as in graduate programs and careers.

The primary goal of this course is for students to develop an understanding of concepts that are applicable to various groups of individuals with special needs. An additional goal for this course is for students to develop a basic understanding of the various disability categories that fall under IDEA, including practices used to support students with those disabilities. This information should lay the groundwork for students to pursue further education on how to teach students with disabilities and to begin their careers working with individuals with disabilities. Specific course objectives are:

1. Understand basic principles of legal mandates that dictate procedures for providing services to individuals with special needs, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
2. Describe procedures used to determine eligibility for special education services, including response-to-intervention (RTI).
3. Describe the individualized education plan (IEP), including how it is implemented.
4. Define the concept of inclusion.
5. Distinguish between the various disability categories defined by IDEA, including practices used to support students with different types of disabilities.

**Why Evaluate This Course?**

I chose to write a portfolio for this course for various reasons. Traditionally, in my department (and in similar departments at other institutions), enrollment for this course has been capped at approximately 30-40 students. However, because of financial constraints with the department, enrollment for this course was increased to 150 students for one section. Consequently, many of the previously used assessment techniques and course activities that were appropriate for 30-40 students are difficult or impractical to implement in a section of 150 students. This large, lecture format of the course poses challenges for obtaining and holding student engagement. For example, because most of the students in the course are education majors, many of them are not accustomed to large-format courses. A key principle of education is that a smaller student-to-teacher ratio leads to more direct instructional time for each student and maximizes student learning. However, I do not believe that a small student-to-teacher ratio is the only method of engaging students and maximizing learning. I would like to identify alternative methods of presenting course content that more directly engages students to become active participants in the learning process than does simply lecturing from a prepared presentation. The first time I taught this course in the spring 2017 semester I experienced difficulties getting students to discuss concepts and respond to questions in class. I frequently attempt to engage students in the content by asking questions during the lecture and moving around the lecture hall, but often students would not respond to questions or the same handful of students would respond repeatedly.

A similar concern is finding ways to promote student attendance throughout the semester without explicitly having an attendance requirement that directly affects students' grades. Previously, I dispersed ten in-class extra credit quizzes throughout the course of the semester to

encourage attendance, but still experienced a steady decline in attendance over the course of the semester. I would like to discover alternative options for assessment of student knowledge without over-burdening myself with responsibilities of grading over 130 assignments that I simply do not have the time to grade. My current assessment approach is to offer multiple-choice exams, and I will likely continue this approach. However, I am also open to including other types of assignments that require students to think about the course content at a deeper level than simply memorizing concepts to take an exam. This issue is particularly relevant for some course objectives, such as *express a philosophy of inclusion*. Finally, because this is an introductory-level course, many of the content areas are not within my areas of expertise. For example, I have extensive knowledge about working with students who have specific learning disabilities, but much less expertise regarding working with students who have visual or hearing impairments. For some content areas, I simply have to teach from the book because of a lack of background knowledge. Implementing other instructional approaches such as having guest lecturers may be more appropriate and foster greater student interest and engagement in the course content for those topics.

The purpose of this benchmark portfolio is to refine this course and provide documentation of effort put in to refining the course, as well as to identify effective instructional strategies and assessment techniques that I may not be currently taking advantage of in my course. Ideally, this portfolio will provide a broad overview of the entire course, as I based the structure for this course on previous introductory-level psychology courses I have taught. My recent experiences with teaching this course have led me to believe that this may have not been the most effective method of presenting this course material and maximizing student engagement. I would like to revise this course to improve student engagement and maximize

student learning, and believe that revision of many different aspects of the course could help achieve these goals.



### **Teaching Methods and Course Activities**

To achieve the course goals outlined above, I have implemented several different teaching methods during actual class time with students. A few of these are methods that have been carried over from the previous semester in which I taught this course, with some modifications, and several are new teaching methods that I am implementing for the first time. These in-class teaching methods include lecturing, videos, guest lectures, question/answer, hands-on demonstrations, and in-class discussion. The primary methods of assessment remained in-class extra-credit quizzes and multiple-choice exams. However, I introduced other assessment methods as well, including surveys and discussion board assignments.

**Supplemental In-Class Activities**

Because this is a large format course, the primary method through which content was delivered (both in this semester and in previous semesters) was through lecturing. However, within the lectures I have attempted to intersperse various types of activities. For example, when introducing each new topic area, the presentation begins with an activity or video to capture interest and prepare students to think critically about the content to be presented. For example, at the beginning of the semester to engage many students in the lecture the presentation began with a question and answer session in which students talked about their own personal experiences related to special education. Because this discussion was focused around students' personal experiences, it resulted in higher than normal participation, as students did not have a fear of answering a question incorrectly in front of many of their peers. Additionally, it allowed students to understand others' perspectives, as students in this course come from diverse backgrounds and have not all had the same experiences when it comes to special education practices. In addition to mixing up the types of teaching methods presented, beginning the semester with in-class discussion sets the stage for the expectation that class discussion and student engagement will be a regular, reoccurring aspect of the course.

Another regular in-class activity was to use videos to provide examples and demonstrations of key course content and keep students engaged throughout the course of a 75-minute lecture. However, rather than just showing a video to the class and moving on, I provided a prompt and questions prior to each video that asked students to think about particular course concepts and how they are exemplified in the videos. Immediately following the video, I elicited student responses to get the students to explain how the concepts they just learned about through lecture were evident in the video. For example, one presentation is focused around working with

students who have emotional or behavior disorders. In my past experiences I found that students have difficulty distinguishing between different behavior disorders, such as oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder. To demonstrate these differences, students watched an in-class video from the television show South Park in which a child exhibited a number of problematic behaviors. Some behaviors were characteristic of oppositional defiant disorder and others were characteristic of conduct disorder. After the video, I asked students to recall the problematic behaviors that they saw in the video and match the specific behaviors to the different disorders. This type of entertaining video activity has the potential to maintain a high level of student engagement while still focusing student thoughts around issues critical to the course content.

An additional method that I planned was to have in-class demonstrations of certain course concepts. For example, for one presentation on individuals with visual impairments, I passed around a copy of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone in braille. The braille version is much larger than the regular book and takes up four separate large books that could not all fit into a student's backpack at once. For another demonstration, I had students attempt to read a simulation of dyslexia in which words move around on the screen to simulate the difficulty with which students with dyslexia have in reading text that others find easy to read. These types of in-class demonstrations allow students to better comprehend the challenges that individuals with different disabilities face on a daily basis, as well as challenges that teachers or other professionals may face in supporting these individuals.

**Guest Lectures**

An additional instructional method that I implemented in this course was to bring in guest lectures to provide students with different perspectives on the course content. Prior to the guest lecture, students were asked to come to class prepared with questions for the speaker, and each student was required to upload one question for the guest speaker to the course Canvas page at the beginning of the class session. This provided students with the opportunity to think about the course content from a different perspective (other than my own perspective or that of the textbook authors) and learn about various career opportunities and stakeholders in the field (e.g., parents, teachers, individuals with disabilities). Many guest speakers presented to the class over the course of the semester, including the Director of Multicultural Education from Lincoln Public Schools, a parent of a child with autism, and a deaf individual who works as an advocate at the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. To assess whether this was a valuable exercise, students completed surveys that asked whether they found the guest speaker interesting and whether the guest presentation made a positive contribution to their understanding of the course content.

The guest lectures helped me realize the importance of variety of in-class activities for retaining student engagement throughout a 75-minute course period. Throughout the semester, the guest speakers used different methods and I was able to observe these in the classroom as an audience member. Some methods were more engaging than others, and at times I found myself losing focus and having difficulty attending to and engaging with longer lectures that did not include other types of activities. If I cannot maintain focus during a 75-minute lecture, how can I expect my students to do so? This realization will lead to further refinement of lectures for future

semesters to continually think about how best to capture and maintain student engagement in a large, lecture-format course.

**Traditional Lecturing**

Regarding traditional lectures that occur as a part of this course, I restructured everything according to new course materials that I was using as well as the “backwards design” principle. Because I was restructuring the course as part of the Peer Review of Teaching program, I also chose to revisit the selection of the course textbook, as I had previously just been using a textbook I inherited. In selecting a new textbook, I chose one that I felt was much more student friendly. It covered the same content yet was more “readable.” The new textbook that I chose to use was published more recently than the other version, and had updated supplemental materials. For example, the videos from the previous textbook I was using looked dated by 20 or 30 years, whereas the new textbook included modern videos that were embedded within the text for students using the digital version of the book. Although these are not required elements of the course and students may or may not access them when reading the text, I have used several of the videos in class to provide examples of certain concepts and check for student understanding. Naturally, the PowerPoint presentations that I use to guide lectures were revised according to the new textbook. However, I also used the backwards design principle to guide revisions to the course. Specifically, I identified the concepts that I believe are the most important for students to learn, wrote exams and study guides based on these concepts, and then revised my in-class presentations to focus on these concepts rather than strictly following the structure of the textbook chapters. I believe that this eliminated a lot of “fluff” from the course. Why should I spend valuable class time teaching a particular course concept if I do not think it is important enough to evaluate for student understanding on an exam?

**Discussion Board Assignments**

In previous semesters, I did not have students complete any activities outside of class, other than reading the textbook and studying for exams. One of the major changes to the course that I implemented this semester was to have students complete four discussion board assignments outside of class. For this assignment, students were placed into groups of 10 and were required to select one out of two to three opinion-based questions to post a response. Following their initial post, students were required to reply to another student's post in their group that contributed to the larger discussion related to the course content in a meaningful way. Because this course has an enrollment up to 150 students, it was not possible to grade every post in detail. Using opinion-based questions made for relatively simple completion-based grading (i.e., full credit, half credit, no credit) while simultaneously facilitating critical thinking about the course content and applying course concepts to students' own beliefs and experiences. However, this process was not perfect, and I will continue revising this discussion assignment for future semesters. My teaching assistant provided feedback that the rubric could be more specific, to better reward students who put a lot of time and effort into thinking about the question, writing a well-thought-out response, and providing evidence from the text or another source to support their response. The completion-based grade used in this semester resulted in many students who did not write a detailed response receiving the same grade as those who did. Continually revising the rubric for this assignment to better elucidate individual differences in quality of student responses should help provide a clearer link between this assignment and student exam scores.

One benefit of the discussion board assignment was that it allowed me to see patterns of student responses and recognize when a particular concept was not well-understood by students, prior to students taking unit exams. For example, one presentation was focused on students with

attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); however, ADHD is not a specific disability category in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; the law that governs delivery of special education services), so most students with ADHD do not receive special education services. One of the discussion board questions focused on whether ADHD should be included as a specific disability category in IDEA. Patterns of student responses indicated that students did not really understand the concept of ADHD, and thought that it fell under a different disability category such as learning or intellectual disabilities. Because of this discussion board assignment, I was able to identify that this was not clear for students and re-teach this concept during in-class presentations to ensure that students had the correct understanding of the course material. On exam questions focused around this issue, students performed well, which may not have been the case had I not addressed this concept in more detail during in-class presentations. Linking out-of-class assignments with the material presented in class is critical to facilitate student learning.



**General Discussion**

I believe that these methods will help better prepare students for classes that follow mine within the special education program, as well as through other programs within the College of Education and Human Sciences. My introductory-level course provides students with the foundational knowledge that they need to succeed in subsequent coursework in the special education program. For example, students must take a full course on functional behavior assessment, but this concept is introduced to students for the first time in my course. Ensuring student understanding of key concepts will better prepare students for both their continuing education and careers. However, I do think that some things could be changed to better link this course with others within the department and college. The special education majors take this course early in their post-secondary careers because it is a prerequisite for other courses. In contrast, non-majors often take it in their senior years. For example, I currently have several speech/language pathology students enrolled who are graduating this semester or will graduate soon. The material on speech/language impairments that we cover is likely already well-understood by these students, and it would be more appropriate for these students to take this course early in their academic careers. Given that this program is in the same department as mine, it may be helpful for these students to take Introduction to Special Education as a prerequisite to some of their other courses, rather than following their other courses. Nevertheless, these students will still benefit from understanding the course content from SPED 201, as they may work with diverse individuals throughout their careers.

### **Analysis of Student Learning**

For this course, I chose to evaluate student learning in several ways. First, I examined student performance on in-class quizzes and exams, as well as out-of-class discussion board assignments to determine whether students were understanding critical course concepts that were central to the learning objectives for the course. Second, because I obtained data for in-class, extra-credit quizzes, I have compared performance by various student characteristics, including major, year, and attendance, and examine whether points scored on quizzes are correlated with performance on the larger unit exams. Finally, I have analyzed data from student course evaluations throughout the semester, as well as pre- and posttest surveys that involved students perceptions of their understanding of key course concepts. Each of these methods is described in detail in the sections below.

## Quizzes and Exams

This semester was the first semester for which I have administered all course quizzes, exams, and assignments through an online learning management system, despite the fact that this course is not an online course. Everything still must be completed in class, but completion of online quizzes and exams allows students to immediately see how they performed, and in the case of the quizzes, identify which questions they missed and view the correct answers for those questions. This system allowed me to immediately view quiz results as well, and address any

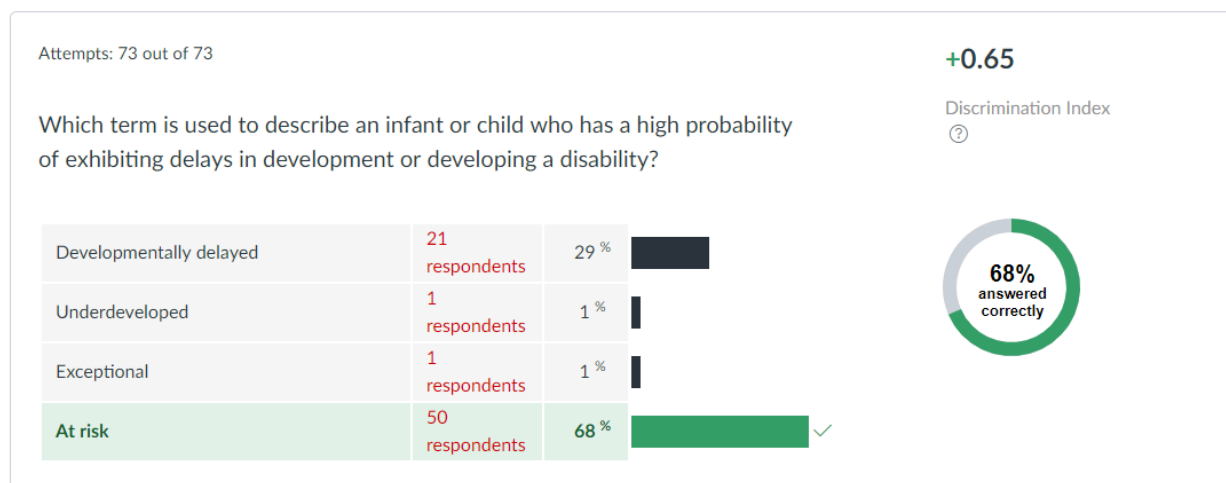


Figure 1a. *Example of performance from an item in-class, extra-credit quiz.*

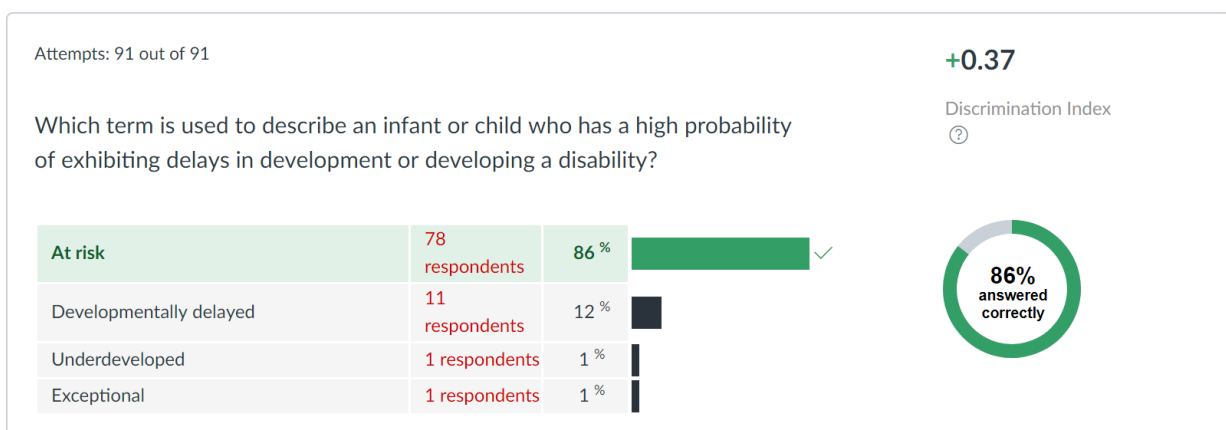


Figure 1b. *Example of performance on the same item approximately one month later for the unit examination.*

issues that came up regarding student understanding of course content. For example, in the question displayed (see Figure 1a), although a majority of students responded to the question correctly, student performance on the question indicated that approximately 30% of the class was having difficulty distinguishing two similar concepts, “at risk” and “developmentally delayed.” I was able to elaborate on this concept immediately following the quiz and elicit student questions and responses regarding the distinction between these two key terms. Because this was part of an in-class, extra-credit quiz that occurred prior to the larger unit exam, I was able to address any misunderstanding before it persisted and resulted in lower exam performance. When the same concept was assessed approximately one month later for the unit exam (see Figure 1b), a significantly higher percentage of students answered the question correctly, demonstrating the benefit of identifying concepts with which students are having difficulty prior to a larger examination.

Although the in-class, extra-credit quizzes helped me identify some topics that students were struggling with prior to exams, I was not able to assess all topics on quizzes that would be assessed on the exams. Additional areas of concern arose from the exam results, and I was able to go back and re-teach these topics, or place greater emphasis on them in the future.

Examination of exam questions allowed me to determine whether the question was a poorly worded question, or whether I may not have done the best job teaching a particular concept. In the case that the question was not poorly worded but that many students still struggled with a concept, it was important for me to go over that concept again in class to ensure that students have a strong understanding of the course concept. This was particularly useful in situations for which I expected a question to be one of the easier questions but a low percentage of students answered it correctly. In general, evaluation of exam results indicated that student scores were

normally distributed, suggesting that the exams were good indicators of individual differences in student understanding (e.g., see Figure 2).

⌚ Average Score	📊 High Score	📉 Low Score	📏 Standard Deviation	🕒 Average Time
<b>81%</b>	100%	52%	6.69	28:22

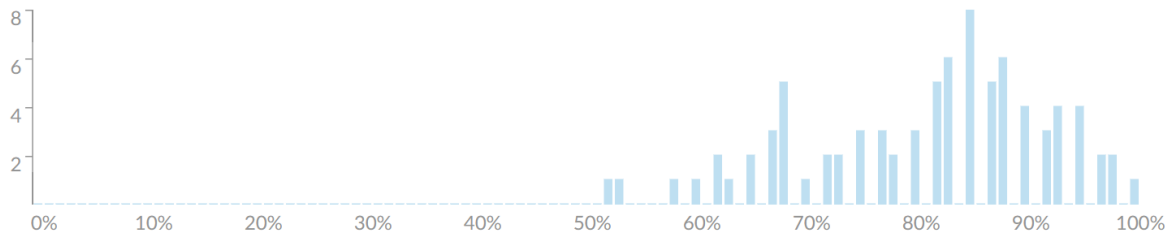


Figure 2. *Histogram of student scores from one of the four primary unit exams.*

**Discussion Board Posts**

For the first time in a large, lecture-format class, I implemented writing assignments for students to complete in the form of discussion board posts. For these assignments, students were asked to respond to opinion-based questions that were related to topics we discussed in class. Students were placed into groups of approximately ten students, and following their response to the prompt, they were required to write a response to another students' post that contributed to the overall conversation in a meaningful way. These assignments were reviewed and graded based on whether they were completed. However, detailed feedback was provided to students to explain the grade they received and clarify any information that students may have written that was incorrect.

Although a completion-based grading system was used for this assignment because of the large number of students in the course, there were substantial differences in the quality of students' written products, allowing me to see individual differences in student understanding of the course content. Certain students generated more thoughtful, detailed responses than others, demonstrating a deeper understanding of the content. For example, in response to a prompt asking whether students agreed with the current system of labeling students eligible for special education services based on the type of disability they have, one student wrote:

*"The concept of categories and labels in this context refers to the process of identifying students as belonging to a certain category of disability. IDEA identifies thirteen of these categories, including Autism, Developmental Delay, and Speech or Language Impairments. In my opinion, this process of labeling is not inherently harmful, although there are negatives that come with the system that must be actively avoided. The primary advantage to the system of categories*

*is that it allows educators to more easily establish an individual's eligibility for services and understand a basis for what services and programs will be most effective for the individual. It allows educators to utilize evidence-based interventions for individuals within a certain category. However, the danger comes with making generalizations based on a category or label. Even though individuals in the categories share characteristics, there is also a lot of variability for each individual. It is important not to let a student's label define them or what is expected of them. Educators must actively work to avoid letting labels lead to stereotyping. If these actions are taken, the advantages of the labeling system can help students succeed to their fullest potential."*

In contrast, another student wrote that:

*"I feel that the purpose of a categories is to put people who have things in common into one group, but labeling is comparing that person to another person or calling them out on their differences. Sometimes its a good and a bad thing to label people. For one, some labels maybe offending to one person, but to another person might they might want to be called out by their label because they can be proud of it. I don't agree with labels. Sometimes people are not given a chance because instead of people getting to know them they only know of their labels and get pre judge based on the labels their were giving, I feel that people should never split the differences with each other. I understand if the label is true and you can see and you know who and what they are and if also acceptable when your trying to describe them because how can you describe them without calling someone out on their label."*

The first student clearly stated their opinion, and described advantages and disadvantages of the labeling system currently used to provide special education services. The second student did state their opinion, but did not necessarily list advantages and disadvantages of the labeling process as it pertains to the field of special education, which is what students were asked to do in the discussion prompt.

Utilizing discussion board posts, similar to implementing in-class quizzes, allowed me to check for student understanding and identify areas of concern prior to lack of understanding a particular concept resulting in lower exam scores. For example, one discussion post required students to discuss whether attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) should be a specific disability category in special education law. A pattern of student responses to the discussion prompt indicated that students did not really understand that ADHD was a disability separate from other disabilities, and thought that students with ADHD could receive services under another category, such as intellectual disability. Based on these student responses, I was able to respond directly to individual students' posts on the discussion board and further discuss this concept during class to correct students' misunderstanding.

Despite some of the advantages that using this type of written assignment provided, I plan to continue to refine this assignment to be more indicative of differences in performance across students. For example, in future semesters I may require students to cite an external source in their discussion post, as doing additional research about the topic they choose to write about should help contribute to knowledge of course content. Additionally, my teaching assistant thought that it would be helpful to have a more detailed rubric that allowed for more nuanced grading to reward those students who gave more detailed replies to the prompts. She mentioned that:



*“I noticed that I was giving students the same scores who barely answered the question and those who did an excellent and thorough job. If there were a way to differentiate performance by a few points to distinguish the “poor” from the “adequate” from the “excellent,” I think that it would be a lot more fair to students who put more time and effort into their posts and replies.*

Refining the discussion board assignment based on this feedback would not only be more fair to students, it would also result in discussion board grades that are more closely related to exam scores and overall course grades, as completion-based grading results in little variation in scores across students.

### Statistical Analysis of Student Characteristics

Statistical analysis was conducted to determine if overall course grades differed based on various student characteristics. Results of analysis of variance indicated that overall course grades did not differ based on student's year in college (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior),  $F(3, 76) = 1.06, p = .37$  (see Table 1). Analysis by student major indicated that course grades significantly differed by major,  $F(3, 78) = 3.98, p < .05^1$ . Follow-up tests indicated that speech/language pathology majors scored significantly higher than students from all other major groups. Interestingly, students who were special education majors had the lowest scores, on average, in the course. Although the overall test comparing student grades across year was not statistically significant, cross-tabulation of student major by year indicated that special education majors were disproportionately represented among freshmen and sophomores when compared to the other majors. This may be one reason why special education majors had lower scores than

Table 1. *Cross-tabulation of student major by year, including average course grades for each major and year.*

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Total	Grade
SPED	13	7	2	1	23	84.45
SLP	1	2	3	1	7	100.60
Other Ed.	1	7	7	11	26	87.31
Other	7	7	4	6	24	90.46
Total	22	23	16	19		
Grade	86.75	87.97	93.16	87.12		

*Note.* Ed. = Education. Course grades are reported as percentages. Because of extra credit opportunities, it was possible to receive a total grade 109.33%.

<sup>1</sup> Despite the substantially smaller number of students who were speech/language pathology majors, Levene's test for homogeneity of variance was non-significant, indicating that significant results of analysis of variance can be trusted.

other students in the course. Finally, results of analysis of variance indicated that student course grades were not significantly different for students who were and were not required to take the course,  $F(1, 80) = 1.01, p = .32$ .

Additional analyses were conducted to determine whether student grades differed based on attendance. Following the first exam, I conducted a simple analysis of variance to determine whether students who attended class (i.e., took one or both of the first in-class, extra credit quizzes) scored higher on exams than students who did not attend class. Results indicated that students who did not take either of the first two extra credit quizzes had an average exam score of 69.5%, students who took one of the two extra credit quizzes had an average exam score of 73.6%, and students who took both extra credit quizzes had an average exam score of 78.4%.

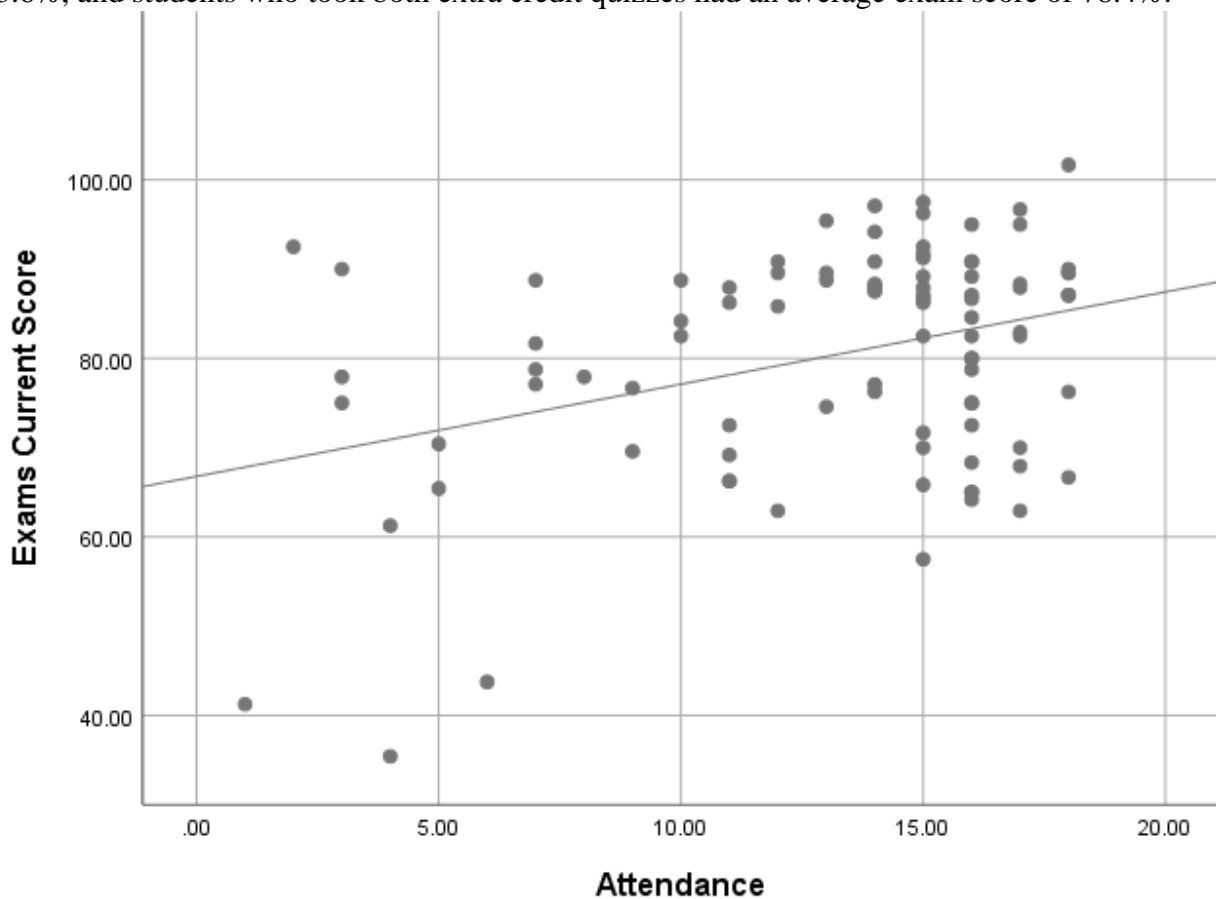


Figure 3. *Scatterplot of student exam scores and attendance.*

This indicated a significant effect of student attendance on the first exam, suggesting that lectures were effective at teaching key course content. I also conducted correlational analyses at the end of the semester to determine whether the total percent of extra credit (i.e., points obtained from extra-credit quizzes and attendance at guest lectures) was significantly correlated with students' exam scores. Results indicated a significant positive correlation ( $r = .43, p < .001$ ), indicating that students who attended class and did well on extra credit quizzes also did well on exams. When the number of questions that students answered correctly on extra-credit quizzes were removed from the data, there was still a significant, positive correlation ( $r = .36, p < .001$ ) between number of classes attended and student performance on exams (see Figure 3).

## Surveys and Student Evaluations

Conducting unit exams in class allowed me to conduct surveys immediately following the exam to obtain information regarding students' perceptions of the utility of course resources and content. To obtain preliminary data regarding students' perceptions of course resources early in the semester, after the first exam students were asked to rate the utility of various course activities. For all course activities and resources (i.e., lectures, PowerPoint slides, discussion board assignments, textbook, study guide), at least 60% of students indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that the course resources and activities helped contribute to their understanding of course content. Students rated the lectures and PowerPoint slides as the most useful course resources, and rated the textbook and discussion board posts as the least useful course resources and activities (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Percent of students rating each course resource and activity as contributing to their understanding of course content following the first course exam.*

	Lectures	Slides	Discussion	Book	Study Guide
Strongly Disagree	0	0	1	1	2
Disagree	3	4	7	5	5
Neutral	11	9	30	22	14
Agree	49	47	44	41	43
Strongly Agree	32	37	16	25	33

Furthermore, open-ended questions during a mid-semester evaluation indicated that students were generally enjoying the course. However, students had several suggestions for how aspects of the course could be improved, some of which I was able to implement for the second half of the class. For example, during the first half of the class I would post the study guide for

all of the chapters approximately 1 to 1.5 weeks prior to the exam. Students feedback indicated that it would be helpful to get study guides for each chapter prior to being able to read the chapter to help them focus on the most important issues in the text and during lecture. This is something that I was able to respond to and implement for the second half of the course. Although final student course evaluations were not available at the time of preparation of this portfolio, the mid-semester evaluation yielded an overall course rating of 4.13 out of 5.00.

The final piece of data that I collected throughout the course of the semester was a pretest and posttest survey of student perceptions of knowledge of content related to the learning objectives originally listed in the course syllabus at the beginning of the semester. Students rated their knowledge of different course content areas on a scale from one to five. Areas assessed were special education law (e.g., IDEA), techniques used to identify eligibility for special education services (e.g., RTI), the individualized education plan, inclusion, and the thirteen disability categories. For all assessed content areas, student self-ratings of knowledge were significantly higher at posttest than they were at pretest (see Table 3).

### **Reflections**

Taken together, the results of these qualitative and quantitative analyses indicate that methods used in this course were largely effective at teaching the course objectives. However, through putting together this course portfolio and analyzing student feedback and data, it has become clear that assignments can be further refined and additional activities can be interspersed throughout the lectures. Specifically, I think that it will be important to include a more nuanced grading system for written assignments, rather than having grades for those assignments be based on completion. Students who spend the time to write a detailed response to discussion prompts should be rewarded for doing so, rather than receiving the same grade as someone who does the bare minimum and potentially has inaccurate information in their post. Additionally, in future semesters I plan to continue to develop a variety of different activities to capture and maintain student engagement during the traditional lecture sessions. Because attendance during the guest lectures started to wane later in the semester, I plan to refine my syllabus to require attendance at these guest lectures. This would allow me to update my written assignments to include reflections on guest lectures, rather than simply pulling topics from the course textbook, as all students would have attended the guest lectures. Finally, I will continue to obtain data and student feedback to improve not only this course, but also my teaching practices more generally that can be applied to other courses I may teach in the future.

## **Appendix: Course Syllabus**

**University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
**Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders**  
**Spring 2018**

### **SPED 201: Introduction to Special Education**

**Instructor: Dr. Marc Goodrich**  
**Office: 271 Barkley Ctr. (2nd Floor)**  
**Phone: (402) 472-3810**

**Email: jgoodrich4@unl.edu**  
**Office Hours: TR 2:00-3:00, or by appointment**  
**TA: Danika Lang**  
**Office: 309 Barkley Ct. (3rd Floor)**

**Email: dlang8092@gmail.com**

**Meeting Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 3:30 – 4:45 p.m.**  
**Location: HECO 11**

### **Required Textbook:**

Gargiulo, R. M., & Bouck, E. C. (2017). *Special education in contemporary society: An introduction to exceptionality*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Interactive e-book link: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/special-education-in-contemporary-society-interactive-ebook-6e/book256248>

**IMPORTANT:** Some form of this textbook is required for this course. However, you have several options, including the loose-leaf or paperback text, the interactive e-book, or both.

### **Course Description:**

With passage of much federal legislation over the years, our nation's educational system has been challenged to educate students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The major premise of this course is that increased knowledge of children with disabilities will help you become better educators regardless of the population you teach.

### **Course Objectives:**

By the end of the semester, students in SPED 201 will be able to:



1. Understand basic principles of legal mandates that dictate procedures for providing services to individuals with special needs, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
2. Describe procedures used to determine eligibility for special education services, including response-to-intervention (RTI).
3. Describe the individualized education plan (IEP), including how it is implemented.
4. Define the concept of inclusion and express a philosophy of inclusion.
5. Distinguish between the thirteen disability categories defined by IDEA, including practices used to support students with different types of disabilities.

### **Course Policies:**

This course will primarily be a lecture-based course with whole class discussion. Periodically throughout the course of the semester, there will be various guest lectures. This course will only meet its objectives if you arrive in class prepared – readings complete – before each class begins. Please be prepared to participate in class, including small-group discussions.

Please be sure to check your UNL email account and Canvas at least once daily. This will be my primary method of communicating with you. Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice. Revisions will be announced on Canvas, which is where the revised Syllabus will be posted. **It is the students' responsibility to use the most up-to-date syllabus.**

### **GRADING/EVALUATION:**

#### **Course Requirements:**

##### **Attendance:**

Readings are to be completed prior to class.

If you miss a day of class, you do not need to notify me. However, you are responsible for anything you miss and for getting back up to speed with the class. Slides for each class will be posted on Canvas prior to each class meeting; however, I strongly recommend that you get the contact information of someone in this class so you can get more detailed notes as the slides mostly provide a basic outline for each lecture. Feel free to contact/see me to discuss any missed materials after you have gotten the study notes.

Additionally, there will be guest lectures throughout the semester. It is especially important that you attend these guest lectures, as there will be questions on the exam that pertain to guest lectures, and there will not be slides posted on Canvas for the guest lectures. Please bring a question for the guest speaker to each guest lecture. Although there will not be enough time for everyone to ask a question, if you come prepared with a question related to the speaker's topic area you will receive one bonus point for your final grade.

**Examinations:**

There will be four unit exams and a cumulative final exam that will cover all of the content covered during the semester. Each exam is worth **60 points**. All exams will be multiple choice and points will be computed based on the number of questions answered correctly (for example, if there are 60 questions on an exam, each question is worth 1 point). **Although there will be 5 exams over the course of the semester, the LOWEST exam grade for each student will be dropped.** Therefore, you can earn a total of 240 points over the four exam scores that are kept.

Any content covered during regular lectures, guest lectures, and textbook chapters may appear on exams. All exams will be administered via Canvas. However, you **MUST** be present in class to take the exams, as an access code will be required and the exam will only be available for a certain amount of time. If you do not have some electronic device (e.g., laptop) that can be used to take the exam in class, please let me know and I will arrange for you to take the exam with a scantron or at the UNL testing center.

**Make Up Exams**

**DO NOT** miss exams unless it is unavoidable and for legitimate reasons. If you must miss an exam, you must inform me as far in advance as possible (e.g., when missing for religious holidays or University events). If you are missing because of illness or an emergency and it is not possible to tell me in advance, then you must contact me as soon as you can after the exam (except in very unusual circumstances, this should be the same day as the exam or the very next day). Contact me by email ([jgoodrich4@unl.edu](mailto:jgoodrich4@unl.edu)) with a message telling me your name, a brief description of why you must miss the exam, and how I can contact you. I may ask for documentation to show that you missed the exam for a legitimate reason. However, contact me in any case, whether or not you believe the reason for missing to be legitimate. There might be a penalty if it was not an acceptable reason, but you do not want a zero on the exam so contact me immediately. All makeups should occur as soon as possible, which in most cases will be no later than during my next office hour session following the day of the exam.

**Discussion Board Posts:**

For each of the four units throughout the course of the semester, you will be required to post your response to a question related to this course on the Canvas discussion board. For these discussion board posts, you will be randomly assigned to a group of approximately ten students. In addition to each post that you make, you must reply to at least one post made by another student in your group. There will be a separate due date for the initial discussion board post and the replies (see course calendar).

These discussion board posts will be graded based on completion and relevance to the question asked. You can receive up to 15 points for each post, resulting in a maximum score of 60 points for the four discussion board posts. Your main post is worth 10 points and your reply to another student's post is worth 5 points. You will receive either full credit, half credit, or no credit for each post (10, 5, or 0) and reply (5, 2.5, or 0). Full credit will be awarded for a completed

discussion board post or reply that adequately addresses the question or original post. Half credit will be awarded for a completed discussion board post or reply that does not adequately address the question or original post. No credit will be given for a post that was not completed. Posts or replies made after the deadline will only be given half credit.

### **Extra Credit:**

Throughout the semester, short pop quizzes (3-4 multiple choice questions) will be given in class. These are not required. Partial credit will be given for completion and additional credit will be given for each correctly answered question. These quizzes will be administered electronically via Canvas, so please bring an electronic device (e.g., phone, tablet, laptop) to class that you can use to access the quiz. If you do not have regular access to an electronic device that you can bring to class, please contact me and we can make other arrangements for you to complete the extra credit quizzes. There will be no make ups for the extra credit quizzes.

Additionally, you will receive one bonus point for bringing a question to class for each guest speaker.

### **Computing your grade:**

There are a total of 300 points available in this course across all exams and discussion board posts. To compute your grade, add together the number of points earned for each exam (except for your lowest exam score) and discussion board post. Any extra credit is added to this total. Then find the total on the chart below. These totals correspond to percentages. For example, 268 out of 300 points would correspond to 89.3%. All grades will be rounded up: so 89.3% would be considered 90% or an A. There will be no exceptions to this rounding procedure.

Grades will be assigned based on the number of points earned:

283-300 points	A+
268-282	A
253-267	B+
238-252	B
223-237	C+
208-222	C
193-207	D+
178-192	D
< 178 points	F

### **On Collaboration with Classmates:**

You may collaborate with other students in the class to find resources, to discuss key concepts, and to prepare for exams. However, examinations and discussion board posts must be completed individually and represent your own work. Extra credit quizzes must be completed individually as well.

## **Civility**

This is a violence free, abuse free campus community. At times we may discuss controversial topics or topics that are sensitive to some students. Please show kindness and respect in your words and actions toward each other.

## **Accommodations**

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodations. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodations to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 1132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

## **University Statement on Honesty and Integrity**

Written work submitted by students is expected to represent independent efforts unless otherwise specifically instructed for assignments that involve group collaboration. Work from other classes cannot be used. If the instructor obtains evidence that a student(s) has/ have duplicated, combined or used information directly from any source on a test or assignment, all students involved will receive grades of F for that test/assignment. Academic honesty is essential to the existence and integrity of an academic institution. The responsibility for maintaining that integrity is shared by all members of the academic community. To further serve this end, the University supports a Student Code of Conduct that addresses the issue of academic dishonesty.

## **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation statement (grading), this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

Unit	Topic	Exams
1	Chs. 1, 2, and 3	Exam 1 – 2/6/18
2	Chs. 6, 7 and 11	Exam 2 – 3/1/18
3	Chs. 8, 9, and 10	Exam 3 – 4/3/18
4	Chs. 12, 13, and 14	Exam 4 – 4/26/18

		Final Exam – 8:30 – 10:30 PM, 4/30/18
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